

in the bill. There is not a defined benefit. We do not know what drugs they would pay for, whether they would have to be in the formulary, not in the formulary. We do not know what it would be. If I ever saw a pig in a poke, this is it.

• Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield on that.

Mr. BERRY. I will be glad to yield to the gentleman from Connecticut.

• Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. I especially want to comment on the remarks of the gentleman from Texas earlier with respect to insuring this initiative. I hail from the great city of East Hartford, in Hartford, home of the insurance industry, and I am very proud of that. But as the gentleman from Texas indicated earlier, under oath, people in the insurance industry understand that this is a sham; that this is something which simply cannot be underwritten; that actuarially it is impossible to ensure this kind of risk. And they do so candidly.

In talking to one CEO, he said this would be like trying to underwrite getting a haircut. So to perpetrate this kind of a sham and a myth on the elderly is outrageous. And the only thing more outrageous is the high prices that they are paying. And the only thing more outrageous than that would be if we do not have an opportunity to present a Democratic alternative here on the floor.

I commend the gentleman from Arkansas and the gentleman from Texas for their long-standing work and efforts in this specific area. But even the insurance industry CEOs understand this is a sham; that it cannot work; that it cannot possibly be priced where anyone who need this benefit could afford to purchase the insurance that would cover it.

Mr. BERRY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Connecticut. And, as I said when I began, it is sad that we are back on this floor once again to have to talk about this issue when we have senior citizens and other Americans all over this country today that are being put at a tremendous disadvantage just because we have continued to allow the prescription drug manufacturers in this country to rob them.

In Washington, D.C., we have a multitude of strategists, consultants, and people that read polls to figure out a strategy to win politically. What the strategists have told our colleagues across the aisle is it does not matter whether they pass anything or not, it does not matter whether they help the people that are getting robbed, it does not matter whether they provide a serious prescription drug benefit for senior citizens or not. The only thing that matters is to vote for something; make them think we are going to do something.

That is just simply not the right thing to do. There are many Members in this House on both sides of the aisle,

and we just had a couple of Republicans earlier this afternoon talk about how unfair it is that Americans pay more than anyone else for their medicine. They have the right idea about prescription medicine for America. What we would like to do is, for once, in the 107th Congress, let us all come together to solve a real problem and to do away with a serious injustice to the American people and to our senior citizens.

Like I said a while ago, we can do this. We know how to do it. This is not rocket science. The interesting thing is that there are many financial analysts that have looked at this and said if we do the right thing, make this medicine affordable, the drug companies will still make more money because they are going to sell a lot more product.

Right now, we have got senior citizens and other Americans that just simply do not take their medicine because they cannot afford it. Imagine a horror movie where there is a terrible, unscrupulous, evil person that owns and has in their possession the medicine to save someone's life, and they sit across the table from that person and hold it just out of their reach, and laugh and ridicule them and make fun of them because they cannot afford it. They would have control. That is a scene that none of us would appreciate nor would want to be a part of. But effectively that is what we do in this country when we allow the drug companies to overprice their product and overcharge the American people.

All we are asking for is a free market situation. Take away the monopoly. Let the market do its work. I am confident that if we do that, we will solve an enormous problem. We will do a lot of people a lot of good, and the drug companies will make just as much, if not more, money than they are making right now.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Connecticut.

• Mr. LARSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Arkansas and again applaud both he and the gentleman from Texas for their continued efforts on this floor, along with our distinguished colleague, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN), who has also been outspoken with respect to this important issue.

The gentleman from Texas, I think, outlined very succinctly the issue we face here. So many seniors have waited in anticipation, after hearing every Presidential candidate, both throughout the primary season and then into the election of 2000, talk about how this was the most important issue facing not only seniors, but Americans in general, and to have virtually almost every Member of Congress and members of State legislative bodies as well come forward and say this is the most important issue to seniors. And so while we have universal agreement that this is the most important issue confronting our senior population, to date we have not seen anything come to the floor.

What an outrage. What a shame. A great Republican President once said, you can fool some of the people some of the time, but the American public will not be fooled by sleight of hand, will not be fooled by sham proposals. They want a straightforward, direct answer.

We should have open debate on this floor about an issue that everyone universally agrees with should be debated. It is our sincere hope that we have a bipartisan resolution. I heard the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) on the floor earlier pleading about the cost of price and the gentleman from Georgia talking about the cost of price and the need for us to get this under control. So, therefore, we ought to have an open debate on this issue, but the American public should be tuned in and understand and be able to see proposals side by side and make up their minds on who is putting forward a proposal that best suits their needs.

This generation that has been heralded by Tom Brokaw and others as the greatest generation ever, this generation that has been heralded in the movies, in books, on the radio, what do they say? They say the time for lip service is over, the time for platitudes is through; provide us with a prescription drug policy that works, that is universal. As the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER) pointed out, that should have been included under the Medicare provision in 1965 so that seniors everywhere would have the opportunity to get prescription drugs at a price they can afford.

The gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) articulated it very well earlier. What we have done is we have turned our senior population into refugees from their own health care system, refugees that have to leave their own country and travel to Canada to afford the prescription drugs that they need to sustain their lives.

Is that how we treat the greatest generation ever? Is that how we award our veterans for their valiant service, that when they need their Nation most in the twilight of their years, when they want to live out their final days in dignity, we are arguing over the cost of a plan? Then if there is a difference between the plans, and the difference is the cost, let the parties be known by what they stand for and whom they are willing to stand up for, and if it is a matter of cost, then the cost has already been paid, and it has been paid for dearly by the sacrifice of generation after generation of Americans, especially those who came back and rebuilt this Nation, who provided their children with the best education ever, that saw this great country rise to the preeminent military, economic, social leader in the world, and for their thanks they are deserving of living out their final days in dignity.

I commend the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER), I applaud the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BERRY), but I recognize deeply as well that

there is an outrage that is being perpetrated. Americans everywhere should be phoning in and calling and making sure. Perhaps maybe some would agree and argue and say, you know what, we think perhaps their approach is better. Then fine. This is America. This is a democracy. Let us lay that proposal out as we are told we are going to see next week, but allow the Democratic proposal. I can't believe I am saying this in this Chamber. Allow the Democratic proposal. Of course the Democratic proposal should be presented side by side, and it should be fully debated. That is what Americans expect. That is the premise on which this Nation was founded. Let it take place. Let it unfold as it well should next week when we have an opportunity to see both plans side by side.

The only thing more outrageous than the price that everyone agrees on, whether they be from Minnesota or Georgia or Texas, Connecticut or Arkansas, is that these prices are way too high, and the people who are paying the price are our senior citizens, those all too often who least can afford to do it. So, therefore, the only thing that would be more outrageous than the prices that they are already paying would be for us in this body not to have an open and fair debate where every Member gets to come down and speak their mind under an open rule on this, what everyone agrees universally is the most important issue that faces our senior citizens, those in the twilight of their lives who deserve to live out those final days in dignity.

□ 1630

I thank the gentlemen from Texas and Arkansas for their support and continue to laud their efforts.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. LARSON), and I appreciate the passion with which he speaks on this issue, which I think is the most important issue that we face. It clearly is an issue that has defined more clearly than any other the difference in viewpoint between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party in this House of Representatives. I am amazed as I try to deal with this issue and talk to my seniors when they struggle to know why can the two parties not sit down and figure this out for seniors. They thought it was going to be done after the last Presidential election.

It breaks my heart to have to explain to them the difficulty that we are having getting this done in Washington, and the reasons that we are having trouble are totally inexcusable. It is not just a matter of the fact that our plan provides a more generous benefit for seniors. In fact, I believe that our plan is the only plan that seniors would want to sign up for because our plan and the Republican plan are both voluntary. If seniors do not want it, they do not sign up and pay the premium. I do not think that they will sign up for an insurance plan that only

offers 22 percent of the savings and the Democratic plan offers over twice as much.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, they could not afford to sign up. It is impossible to underwrite that actuarially. Every insurance man and CEO will say that. They have sworn under oath that is the case. The gentleman is right about this being a defining moment, not only for the respective parties, but for America and for this Chamber. Between this body and the other body, there are 535 Members. There are over 600 pharmaceutical lobbyists currently working the Hill. It is time to decide who is going to have their say in the well of this House and on this floor, whether it is going to be the money changers or whether it is going to be the men and women of this Chamber who are going to be allowed to vote up or down, to have a say on the proposal that they are putting forth, the Democratic proposal the gentleman has espoused this evening.

Mr. TURNER. When the gentleman says that, it makes me realize how difficult it is to break through when the Republican friends are so beholden to the pharmaceutical industry for their campaign contributions. It is definitely a factor that weighs heavily in this debate because we cannot get control over prescription drug costs unless we are willing to step forward and tell the pharmaceutical manufacturers they have to offer the American people the same prices they offer people anywhere else in the world.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman is absolutely right. This is tantamount to the same vote we had on campaign finance reform. This is truly a profile-in-courage vote. And the vote here is merely just to allow two programs to appear side by side, the best effort of one party, the best effort of another party, and then to vote that issue up or down. We are told that perhaps even votes to recommit will not be allowed.

A vote to recommit in my mind is inane anywhere, and it is an abrogation of our responsibility and duty, especially since every single Member has campaigned on this issue in their district. It is a shame that Members who are not chairs of committees and who do not normally get a chance to speak unless they come after business is done will not have an opportunity to speak on this issue. Every voice in this Chamber should be heard on this specific issue.

This is the issue, after all, as the gentleman points out, that everyone campaigned on. There can be no more hiding. There can be no more putting this off. Seniors cannot wait. Each day that we delay is another evening that a couple spends, or a single person spends at night trying to decide how they can afford what they have to pay for the cost of their prescription drugs or what they have to pay to heat and/or cool their home or the very food that they need to place on their table to sustain them.

We are a better Nation than that. We are a better Chamber than that. On both sides of the aisle I believe both parties want to see a vote on this issue. Let us make sure that we get a chance in an open rule to have an opportunity to vote our conscience, our hearts, and vote with the senior citizens of this great Nation of ours.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, the American people deserve to have the opportunity to choose between these two competing plans, and they will not have the opportunity to choose between the two plans if the Republican leadership denies the Democratic caucus an opportunity to offer our alternative plan. It is amazing as we stand here this afternoon on the floor of the House of Representatives, with thousands of seniors listening to this discussion, at this very moment the pharmaceutical industry is running television ads trying to promote this Republican plan in almost every State in this Nation.

In fact, I watched one of the ads this weekend when I was in my district. The ad said it was paid for by United Seniors Association, and has a senior citizen actor talking about the benefits of the Republican plan. Not many people know that the United Seniors Association is a front group for the pharmaceutical manufacturers, well reported, well known in the major newspapers; but many seniors will never notice, and they will think that ad is talking about something that is good for them. But the only folks that Republican plan is good for is the pharmaceutical industry which backs it 100 percent.

I think it is important for us to be honest with the American people about this debate. It is not only a debate of the power of the pharmaceutical industry versus the rest of the people in this country and our seniors, it is a battle that involves the issue of what do we really think about Medicare. The Democrats in this House believe Medicare has been a successful program for our seniors. One of the reasons, in addition to the opposition to the pharmaceutical industry, one other reason that our Republican friends will not support the plan we propose is because we add the prescription drug benefit as a part of the regular Medicare program. One of the agendas in the Republican prescription drug plan is to move this country away from regular Medicare into what we commonly call Medicare+Choice plans that are run and offered by the insurance industry.

Now, I come from a rural area, and there were a few Medicare+Choice plans offered a couple of years ago, and some of my seniors signed up for them because the health insurance companies said they would give them a little prescription drug benefit. Those private plans have sent out notice to seniors their plan is cancelled, and they are back on regular Medicare wondering how they are going to get any help with their prescription drugs.

Some people act like the private insurance industry is ready to offer